

Language revitalization: issues and outcomes

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‘Saving a language’?

- ▶ Documentation — conservation — preservation
 - ▶ ‘like salmon in cans’?
 - ▶ in a museum?
- ▶ Language revitalization: activities to restore/increase the **vitality** of a language
 - ▶ not only dictionaries, grammars learning materials etc.
- ▶ Usually driven by ‘the community’ (who are they?)
- ▶ Strategies should emerge from aims
 - ▶ but aims are often not articulated or evaluated
- ▶ What do people involved understand by ‘saving a language’?
 - ▶ Needs to take into account language attitudes, ideologies, discourses



Aims and models of revitalization

“Without intergenerational mother tongue transmission ... no language maintenance is possible.”
(Fishman 1991: 113)

- ▶ But is reinstating an endangered language as primary medium of socialization a realistic aim?

“In the future, will linguistic diversity be sustained by different patterns of reproduction than in the past?”
(Romaine 2006)

- ▶ e.g. schools, adult learning and teaching

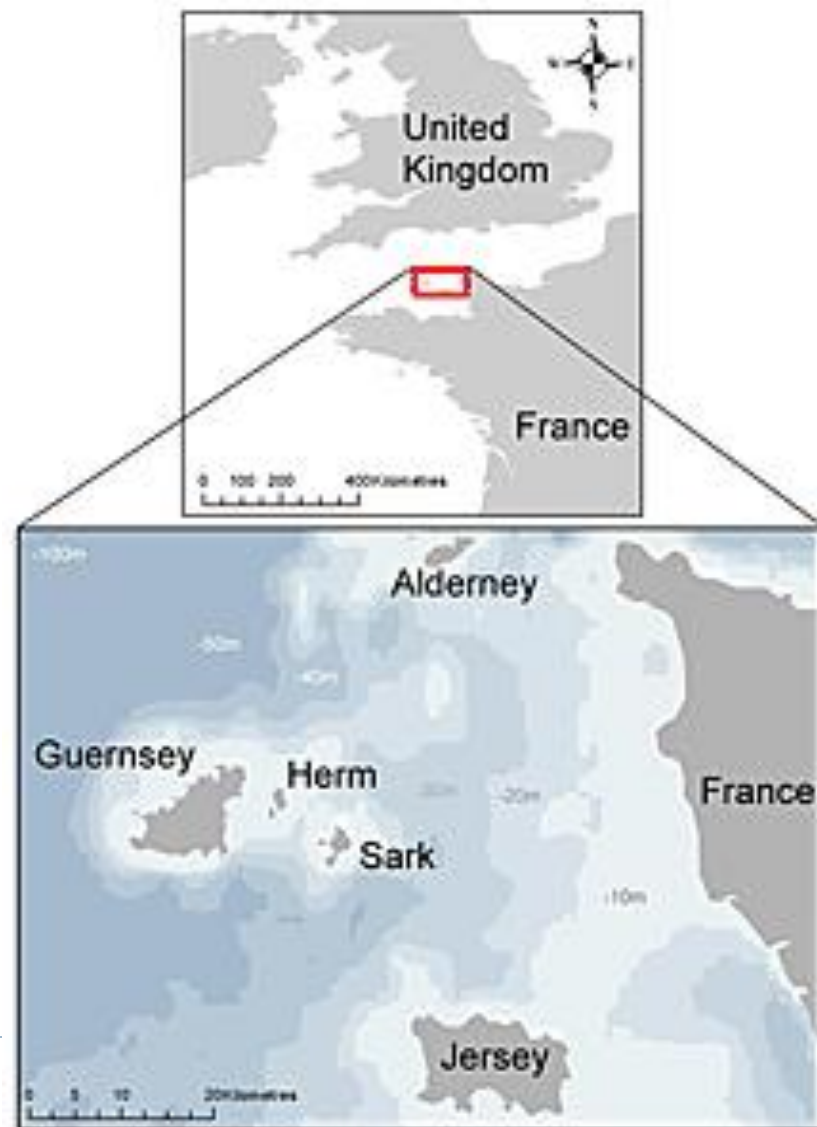
“Language revitalization need not be an all or nothing venture” (Thieberger 2002)

- ▶ are token phrases adequate for revalorization/identity purposes?
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Channel Islands: background

- ▶ Location: Europe, 80 miles from UK, 20 miles from France
- ▶ Political affiliation to Britain but autonomous
 - ▶ own parliaments and laws
- ▶ Population: Guernsey 62,000; Jersey 90,000
- ▶ Belonged to Normandy before 1066 (conquered England)
- ▶ Well known for: cows, milk, sweaters, tomatoes, tourism, finance, German occupation in WW2
- ▶ Indigenous languages are Norman varieties
- ▶ Majority language now English
 - ▶ 16th-19th cent.: French was High language
 - ▶ Not widely spoken but high prestige









Vitality of the indigenous vernaculars

- ▶ Jèrriais and Guernesiais are classed as ‘severely endangered’ by UNESCO (2009), but they are nearer to ‘critically endangered’:
 - ▶ “the youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially and infrequently”
- ▶ Under 300 fluent speakers of each?
- ▶ Increasingly positive attitudes among general population (mainly Anglophone)
- ▶ Not officially recognized
- ▶ Not part of school curricula
- ▶ The next 2-3 decades will be critical
 - ▶ Most traditional native speakers will pass away
 - ▶ There are few new fluent younger speakers



Language policy: Jersey

- ▶ Office du Jèrriais since 1998: 3 officers
- ▶ Peripatetic lessons: 30-40 minutes/week in some elementary (primary) and secondary schools
 - ▶ Enjoyed by children but emphasis on written language, grammar
 - ▶ Language awareness is part of Citizenship programme
- ▶ Some public signage (mostly in tourist areas)
- ▶ Website: 3000 pages in Jèrriais
- ▶ School leaving level examination
 - ▶ But nobody has passed it yet
 - ▶ No school learner has become fluent
- ▶ Evaluation is quantitative rather than qualitative
 - ▶ Focus on minutiae rather than 'big picture' / strategic planning



Language policy: Guernsey

- ▶ Voluntary extra-curricular sessions in schools since 2004
 - ▶ Taught by volunteers: no teacher training
 - ▶ No agreed standard or spelling
 - ▶ Three adult classes – none beyond elementary level
- ▶ Language festivals / performance
- ▶ Government rhetoric in favour of language revitalization
 - ▶ Language officer 2008-11
 - ▶ ‘Exciting new strategy’ announced February 2013
- ▶ What are the aims and rationales of ‘revitalization’ activities?
 - ▶ What language ideologies drive them?



Language for performance





LE COMITÉ
CULTURE GU

P'TIT,
-MAIS PLLOI



‘Flagship’
presence



Mission Statement

*The objective of the Jèrriais
programme in schools is*

To ensure the survival of
Jersey's own language for
the benefit of future
generations by capturing the
imagination of students with
the colour, piquancy and
vigour of Jèrriais

Themes emerging from the research

- ▶ Focus on formal education, ‘technical fixes’
- ▶ Identity promotion, island distinctiveness
- ▶ Lack of ‘prior ideological clarification’ (Fishman 1991) / strategic planning
 - ▶ tendency not to specify goals (short or long term)
 - ▶ lack of evaluation of outcomes (until new Guernsey initiative)
- ▶ Issues of authority and correctness
 - ▶ in language itself (‘they’re going to change the language’)
 - ▶ in decisions about priorities and policies
- ▶ ‘Modernist’ / ‘Western’ model of language and its functions
 - ▶ e.g. schools, writing, standardisation



‘Saving a language’

- ▶ **Diverse stakeholders**
 - ▶ traditional speakers, ‘owners’, ‘new speakers’, latent/‘semi’-speakers, learners, supporters, politicians ...
 - ▶ **Different goals and understandings of language revitalization**
 - ▶ ‘Increasing the number of speakers’
 - ▶ ‘We’ve got to get our language in the schools’
 - ▶ Nobody mentions language in the family; less and less informal language use
 - ▶ Performance is seen as an end in itself
 - ▶ **In both islands documentation is urgent**
 - ▶ Not being done in Jersey
 - ▶ Some government and ELDP funding in Guernsey
 - ▶ **For a highly endangered language, the future lies with second-language speakers**
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- ▶▶ **Need for both effective teaching/learning and empowerment of learners**

Merci bian dei fei!
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*Thank you
for
shopping at*
CHECKERS
A la perchôine

The image shows a red rectangular sign mounted on a metal frame. The sign features the text 'Thank you for shopping at CHECKERS A la perchôine'. The words 'Thank you' and 'for shopping at' are in a white, italicized sans-serif font. 'CHECKERS' is in a bold, white, sans-serif font, with a yellow and black checkered pattern replacing the 'H'. 'A la perchôine' is in a yellow, italicized sans-serif font. The sign is set against a background of a parking lot with cars and a building.